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It's Time to Prepare for Garden

If you plan to have a garden in the spring, get ready for it now. An early start is worth the effort in Oklahoma.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has just published its 1977 yearbook, entitled "Gardening for Food and Fun." It is undoubtedly the most complete gardening publication ever printed, but it doesn't emphasize fall preparation quite enough.

Perhaps this isn't as important in other parts of the country as it is in pivotal Oklahoma, where climates overlap.

In the USDA book, the nation is divided into four major regions for gardening purposes. Oklahoma is the only state that lies partially in two regions and adjoins the other two. We probably have some advantages and some disadvantages of all four regions, with nothing applying fully.

Logically, gardening begins with selection of the site and preparation of the soil. To have your garden ready for working in the spring,

these steps need to begin now in Oklahoma. There won't be enough good working days in January and February to do everything before planting time.

Garden talk usually doesn't begin until March or April. That's when garden stories appear in print and experts come on TV to tell how to choose a site and prepare the soil. In Oklahoma, if you wait until then, you've missed it.

Nearly all spring vegetables need to be popped into the ground, either as seeds or plants, as soon as the danger of frost is past so they can start growing before hot weather.

Writers of the book point out that an average family can save from \$200 to \$400 annually on food costs by growing and processing fruits and vegetables at home. This is after expenses for seeds, plants, tools and other costs are paid.

Reward for your work will come in freshness and quality of naturally-ripened vegetables, enjoyment of out-of-doors activities, and satisfaction of accomplishment.

Nearly everybody who lives on an ordinary city lot could clear space for at least a small garden although trees and house often create shade and competition problems.

The USDA book is elementary enough to help the newest beginner in gardening, but comprehensive enough to be valuable to the most expert gardener.

It includes color illustrations of many plants, the most common insect pests, and a few plant diseases. It also has diagrams that depict steps to be taken in everything from planting to canning and preserving. In the back, a metric counter will help gardeners convert from inches to centimeters.

The book may be bought from the Superintendent of Documents at the Government Printing Office in Washington, but to start saving on your garden, write your congressman and get a copy free. The USDA yearbooks are printed primarily for congressmen to give to their constituents.